

The Story of Avi Schaefer

An educational unit for a Jewish Summer Camp setting: This session is designed for high school age campers in American Jewish summer camps.

Time required: 1 hour.

Conditions: A room with an option to hang photos and screen a video clip (available on ASF website)

Session outcome: The session aims to highlight Avi's love of Israel and his universal view of the world as a place that needs repair. Participants will be inspired and empowered by the story as Jewish teens who are thinking about their role in the Jewish community and in the world, during the high school years and beyond.

The session opens with a trigger that doesn't relate directly to Avi's story. **The goal of the trigger** is to bring the participants to think about the issues that were part of Avi's consciousness and action, **before** getting acquainted with Avi's story. The assumption is that the participants are not interested in a memorial activity and we need to engage them from the place where they are at.

Program Begins with small groups (10 minutes)

Opening Questions – short answers to be briefly shared – perhaps written down on a white board or flip chart

When I will graduate from high school, I will.....

As a teenager, I can make the world a better place by.....

When something that happens in my country that deeply disturbs me, I.....

When something that happens in Israel that that deeply disturbs me, I.....

For me, Israel is...

In order to shape my opinion on Israel, I need to...

I think about Israel when

When I meet Israelis, I

Small groups are disbanded and move into large group (5 minutes)

Questions for discussion for the large group (10 minutes):

1. How important is Israel for American Jews?
2. How can American teens express their support for Israel?
3. How do we deal with situations whereby Israel is critiqued or even attacked?

Either introduce a family member to tell Avi's story or read the following biography below (5 minutes)

Avi's Biography:

Avi, along with his identical twin brother Yoav, was born on June 11, 1988 in Los Angeles, California to parents Rabbi Arthur Gross-Schaefer and Laurie Gross. The family moved to Santa Barbara in 1990 where Avi became an active participant in the Jewish community.

Throughout high school, Avi engaged in Israel advocacy, and took it upon himself to organize programs, write op-ed articles, and educate the greater community on behalf of the State of Israel. He actively participated in his Jewish youth group on both a regional and national level, serving on NFTY's Southern California regional board. Avi spent his summers at Jewish summer camps both as a camper and later as a counselor.

Avi believed in the importance of community, and volunteered his time weekly to work with elderly, and created and taught a class to educate local Jewish youth on Judaism. Avi was an enthusiastic rock climber and accomplished martial artist, holding a black belt in Kung Fu. Avi had an expanded worldview and an appreciation of different cultures, which he gained through his experiences as **a high school student in Israel,** and traveling throughout Europe and North Africa at age 17.

At age 18, Avi along with his brother Yoav, left home and moved to Israel, volunteering to serve in the Israel Defense Forces. Avi served for three years in the army as a lone soldier, having no immediate family in Israel. He was accepted into a Special Forces combat unit, and underwent rigorous and demanding physical and mental training. Avi later served as a counter-terrorism instructor and trained Israel's most elite units. He quickly distinguished himself as an outstanding soldier, earning the respect and admiration of his superior officers. **Avi felt that it was his duty as an American Jew and dedicated Zionist to serve in the army** and protect Israel's borders and citizens. Moreover, he saw the army as the best way to acclimate to his new life in Israel as a new citizen.

Upon completion of his army service, **Avi was accepted to Brown University in Providence**, Rhode Island. In the summer of 2009, he left Israel to pursue a degree in International Relations and Middle East studies. **As a freshman at Brown, Avi was committed to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East and actively sought to change the atmosphere towards the Israel-Palestinian conflict on campus.** Motivated by his father's words that, "an enemy is someone whose story you have not yet heard," **Avi engaged in dialogue and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians.** Avi eagerly offered his services to the Providence Police department, utilizing his army skills to train the SWAT team.

Avi became a natural leader and role model for the Brown Jewish community in advocating for Israel, while simultaneously reaching out a hand for peace and reconciliation. Avi sought to prove that he was a **"soldier for peace"** and **saw no contradiction in fighting for Israel's security and building peace.** In an open letter to the Brown Daily Herald, Avi wrote, "I went to the army so that my children will not have to- a dream I fear may not come true." Fun-loving and outgoing, Avi made friends throughout the Brown community, sharing his passion for ideas and change with everyone he met. His beliefs and his actions were never at odds; rather, he constantly strove to integrate his principles with his actions. After the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, Avi organized a Party for Haiti, raising \$5,000 to be donated to IsraAID's efforts in the devastated nation. Always integrating his passion for Israel and Jewish life with his passion for community, friendships, and social justice, Avi was a living testament to his own ideals and an inspiration to those who remember him.

Avi's life came to a tragic end on February 12, 2010, when he was struck by a drunk driver while walking home to his dormitory at Brown University.

At this point it is recommended that if there is a person who knew Avi personally, there will be an opportunity to tell participants about Avi from a personal perspective. (5 minutes)

Video clip can be shown. (7 minutes)

Concluding Discussion (10 minutes):

1. What is your reaction to Avi's story?
2. What can we learn from Avi's story about being a Jewish role modeling?
3. If you could take one thing away from the story that you would like to do? What would that be?

Concluding Project (pass out pre-printed half sheets of paper and colored pencils, pens, crayons) (5 minutes):

Seek _____ and
Pursue _____

Your name _____

Introduce this project: One of Avi’s favorite sayings and the theme for the ASF comes from our tradition, “Seek peace and pursue it”. This saying is on the t-shirts, bracelets, website for the Avi Schaefer Fund, and in their hearts. We are asking each of you to fill in your own ideas and commitments on the sheet passed out to you and we will then give them to Avi’s family.

Conclusion – pass out brochures (2 minutes):

And now, we have something for you, a small brochure about Avi that also has a prayer for peace on the back. We hope that you will keep this, reflect upon his story, and then take on the responsibility of sharing Avi’s story and helping to be a part of his legacy.

Thank you so much facilitators and Campers!!!!